

**Linda Clair**  
**Five-day Meditation Retreat**  
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**Transcription from Audio Recordings**

**File 5c – Wednesday morning discussion session**

Question: I've got a question. I've got about twenty actually but I'll try and hold it to one or two for now. Today and yesterday have been really interesting for me. It feels like I'm still doing the same thing but the experience of sitting has become quite different in a strange way. I guess partly what's been going on is I'm not doing a lot of counting. Even when I'm not just focusing on the breath, it felt like there's a continuum between, at one end, doing the sneaky counting where you're sort of counting but very lightly and there's thoughts churning along in the background, to the other end of the continuum where you're really focusing intently on the breath or the counting and excluding thoughts. But it was feeling like this continuing between those two extremes. I could put slightly more focus, like when a lot of churning thoughts are coming, just to bring me back and then gradually dial back and go to the softer more open awareness.

Then this big spaciousness would come in as well. But it was like there were three things going on at once. I could feel the breath in my belly and my body sensations and then this big space. I've noticed there are still a lot of thoughts but most of the time I'm managing to catch them fairly quickly and come back, although occasionally I'll realise I've gone into a dreamy thing for some time and then come back. Does that sound overly technical? It just feels really different to how it's been previously, sitting.

Linda: Different in what way? More stuff happening at once?

Question: Well, there's three things going on at once, which I've never experienced. And it's like they're interdependent and one needs to build on the other.

Linda: Well, that's how it is and that's what happens. It's not becoming more complicated. It's just becoming more concentrated, and faster. So everything's happening faster and eventually you do see it's not just three things happening at the same time. It's everything happening at the same time. But this is a build up to that. So just keep doing exactly what you're doing.

Try not to have any intention to feel anything in particular. Naturally go back and forth from a bit too much attention to not enough attention. Then you'll be in that middle point at times and then everything will open up because that mid-point is that timeless point where everything does open up and you realise everything is happening at the same time. But you need to be incredibly grounded for that to happen. It sounds complicated but it's not really, and it's all happening naturally.

Question: It was sort of spontaneous. I'm not thinking about it or planning it in any way.

Linda: Yes, so good. Things will keep quickening; getting faster and faster. Everything is happening at the same time but you have to build up to that and to cope with that. You just can't think because then that takes you into the time based – what people call – reality. It's not reality but that time-based dimension. As you're coming out of that you do see that it's all happening at once and you have to be incredibly alert, incredibly fast, and use your intelligence rather than your mind.

So it's happening in your body, your brain. And your intelligence is coming in and just doing what needs to be done. Seeing what needs to be done and doing it.

Question: It was strange because just in that last sit I felt a completely different sort of energy to what I've felt in previous sits. Because normally it's sort of tingly, almost like electricity flowing through my body, and there will be bursts or a little current, and often it will only be for a few seconds and dissipate. But in that last sit it was like this pressure flowing through my body. It was like this huge wave just pushing into me. I was struggling to breathe even. My body was just breathing itself but it was like this huge effort. It was really strange just to be sitting there feeling this intense thick pressure flowing through my body, which was very unusual.

Linda: Did you find that interesting?

Question: Very fascinating, and it wasn't unpleasant.

Linda: So try not to wonder too much about it. Anything that changes is a good sign. Something different like that means that something is happening – something incredible is happening. So keep doing exactly what you're doing. And I know you've been working really hard, particularly the last few months, and it's starting to show.

Question: It's been very interesting, well fascinating. But for the first time ever in a retreat, for the first full day I had what sounds like a common experience for a lot of people, of "What am I doing here? This is crap!" I've never had that before in a retreat but it finally came up this time for me, the, "This is a bit pointless, a waste of time."

Linda: "It's boring, I'm just going to sit here." But you're the only one who's expressed that this time. I don't know if everyone else felt it or not.

Question: I remember on previous retreats it seems to have come up a fair bit. And one other cool thing about when I was feeling this spaciousness. I remember as a kid I'd often be trying to visualise the fourth dimension and three-dimensional space and you would hear about multiple dimensions and you'd struggle, but it was weird. It was like all of a sudden I could experience another dimension, a space that was permeating ours but that was completely independent of it with independent dimensions. It was really cool. You can't picture it with your mind but it's almost like you can feel it.

Linda: No, because it's something beyond the mind. And once you go completely beyond it you just realise what a waste of energy it was trying to understand anything like this because you can't understand it. It's only when the mind gives up, or starts to give up, that you start to get a bit of a sense of how huge this is and how limited thinking is – how incredibly limited the mind is – it just can't fathom this, it can't understand. So it goes crazy at the end just thrashing around as you're going into space.

Question: And the other thing that arose was how critically important the groundedness was to be able to experience that. And while this was happening, just to be continually remembering to come back to the breath in the belly. It became clear that you would only be able to go into it superficially. It would be easy to forget the breath and concentrate on it and try and move into it but that you would then be going off into fantasy again.

Linda: Yes, quite easily.

Question: It was great to see the importance of that – as well as trusting you.

Linda: To be told again and again and again.

Question: And seeing the importance of that myself when experiencing stuff like this.

Linda: It's also incredibly important after realisation too, because you can still get a bit caught up in the whole thing. So it's important in a different way after, but yes, you have to be grounded to be able to fully realise this. I feel so grateful for this practice which is basic Zen practice because that's what they emphasise. You go to a monastery, you're just grounded whatever you're doing. I remember the master saying, "Everything you do, do it from here. Do it from down here." It's so simple but it's so essential, and it works.

Question: I've just got a question around strong emotion. When a strong emotion is coming up I'm getting a bit confused in regards to my mental real estate or my attention. I'm sitting with the breath and I'm getting a bit confused as to whether to focus on a strong emotion, to sit with an open awareness of the body and emotions as a whole, or to sit with the breath. I notice the other day you mentioned bring your attention to the belly but not focusing on the belly. So I just wanted to see if you could give me some clarity around that – how to deal with that, especially when I'm going through my day too. I find I can get confused as to where to put attention if I've got strong, particularly negative emotion, or any emotion in general.

Linda: So I'd say don't label emotions as negative or positive – just see them as emotions. When you do feel emotional, you feel pretty helpless. That's how I used to feel and that's a huge reason I started this, because I just felt helpless. I'd be going along feeling okay and then suddenly someone would say something and I'd just about have a fit and I'd feel awful suddenly. When you're feeling an emotion when you're sitting, the stiller you become, often the more emotional you can become, because a lot of emotions we repress or distract ourselves from in some way, in any way we can. And everyone's got their favourite ways but I suppose thinking is one of the favourite ways of trying to repress emotions.

So when that starts to break down you get some very strong emotions coming up that might have been there for a long, long time. It's another reason to be as grounded as you can, to allow those emotions to arise without them becoming totally overwhelming. But having said that, during my practice I cried a lot. I felt very emotional at times, other times not so emotional. But you know a lot of it was quite an emotional time. The thing is not to indulge them too much and not to repress them. It depends on the emotion and the situation, what you can do.

What we tend to do is try and dump our emotions on someone else or something else, blame something for our emotions, rather than taking responsibility for them. This is really about taking responsibility for how we feel and not blaming anyone or anything else for it. That of course, is a really difficult thing to do because we are so used to blaming. So there's no easy way. You just have to see it and own it without repressing it. Say you feel really angry about something and you're having an argument. Sometimes it's better to just walk away and give yourself a bit of breathing space and then come back, rather than getting totally obsessed with dumping something on the other person. And it's the same with this situation. If you're doing something and you get really angry about it trying to work something out, walk away for a while and then come back.

But as you're walking away do a little mini-meditation: just be in your body, walk, count, breathe. It's not going to take it away but it will help to break the momentum that starts to build up when we do get really emotional. So accept that you are going to get emotional at times. Let yourself cry, let yourself release it in some way if you need to. But don't indulge it for too long because then it will just take over in a different way.

Question: And when we're sitting with the breath, coming back to the breath, if you've got a strong emotion – say you're sitting with an emotion and you're observing it, you're not indulging it – but then you decide to go back to the breath for a while, would you say that's suppressing it?

Linda: No, I'd say it's just grounding, breaking it up. Because it will keep coming up, you won't be able to push it away. If it's a really strong emotion it will come up, particularly about a certain situation or person or whatever. It'll keep coming up and you will see it – you can't help but see it. But then the hard bit is really removing yourself from it, not indulging in it too much, and coming back. Breaking it again and again and again. It'll come up again, and you come back.

You might sit for an hour, a whole sitting, with that emotion coming up and some people might say, "Oh, that was a waste of time. It was a bad sitting because I just kept thinking about this situation." But really what it's doing is wearing down the mind. If you're not getting into it for too long it is cutting that momentum again and again and again. So, it's persistence – you need to be incredibly persistent because his stuff is not going to go away overnight. And it's also the *thinking* about the situation that's the thing. It's not really the situation or the emotion – well, the emotion is thinking really – it's that addiction to it you need to break, and that's what we're doing. The bait, the thought, can be very, very powerful at times and it can feel almost impossible to break away from it. But you need to keep doing it when you can. It's like you're wearing down the power of the mind. And rather than being completely helpless, you start to feel this strength coming in and this independence – and that keeps going. Then there are other times when you do just feel so emotional that you might break down for a while.

Question: I wanted to ask you about when you were saying to put your attention on the movement of the thinking. The last two sittings I've been really paying attention to that and it's so close, the attraction, that suddenly I'm finding myself in the thought, and then keep going with that and always the breath. Then I'm starting to look for what is the trigger, what is the lure? The closest I got now is it's like an image will come in, and then there's a follow on, or a sound. Is that what you're saying?

Linda: But I would say don't even question what is the lure, because it will change with the situation. There'll be a whole lot of different ones. Sometimes it will be an image, sometimes a situation, an emotion, a sound, whatever – it doesn't matter what that is. But as soon as you realise

that you've moved towards it – and the movement towards it is the addiction, not the actual subject, not the actual thought – it's that continual movement that becomes habitual, deeply habitual. It's motivated by fear, fear of actually being here. So as soon as you realise you've moved away from your body, from here, break it if you can and come back. And the sooner you can break it, the more chance you've got of coming back.

Once you're firmly embedded in a thought it's very difficult to turn around and come back because it's like you're just gone. But that (coming back) will quicken you – your consciousness gradually quickens the more you break that momentum of thinking. But what you were talking about with the thinking and being able to come back is an incredible thing because you start to realise, "I'm not at the mercy of my mind. I do have the capacity to be able to do this." I remember first feeling that really, really strongly and it was like, "Ah, this is amazing, and maybe it is possible, maybe it is." You keep doing it and you go through different things like emotional stuff. It's not like it all goes smoothly or easily but you do start to realise, "This *is* possible." That gives you much more motivation to do it.

Question: I've been feeling like I can stay watching the breath quite a lot. I'm noticing it particularly today. When I close my eyes there's a lot of space and I can't feel my body very well. I think I'm *thinking* feeling the breath because I can't feel my hara as much as I've felt in other retreats and I'm feeling quite ungrounded. Now I think...

Linda: But you're not sure...

Question: (laughing) I'm not sure because it's a very energised, amazing feeling that doesn't go away, but I feel quite shaky and I noticed I was a bit jumpy. At the start of that last sit noises were disturbing me and I feel like it's too much.

Linda: Yes, it does feel too much sometimes. It doesn't mean you're not grounded. It just means, I think, that a lot of energy is coming in and you are having a bit of trouble coping with it. But it doesn't mean that you're not necessarily grounded. If you do have trouble feeling the breath, particularly when you're feeling like this, put your hand down there.

Question: I did that in the last sit and it did help.

Linda: So do that. Have something to eat at lunchtime and that will ground you a bit more too. You'll be okay. It's just that you feel a bit over energised. It can happen. And sometimes, yes, you're not aware of your body – it's like it's all just space. Lunch is coming at the right time so have something to eat and have a rest or be out in the sun. That will help you to absorb it a bit more. But it can feel like that sometimes, like, "What's going on?"

Linda: How are you?

Question: I'm good. Last night I had that, "This is going okay." (laughter)

Linda: A bad sign! (laughing)

Question: Yes, I know, "I'd better tell Linda." Yes, just working and trying to be as contained as possible.

Linda: Yes, I've noticed you working.

Question: This morning I had a little bit of a getting stiller and stiller and then having some form of death realisation where I saw a large chunk of momentum just fall away, be really pointless. So I've just been trying to be really grounded and stable since then.

Linda: When did that happen?

Question: The nine-thirty sit. I was really tired but surprisingly I haven't been real heavy, like, how-can-I-get-up-from-this-sit tired. I've been able to be with each step a little more. Thank you. And my experience of the teaching has changed a bit too. I'm trying to be as open and grounded as possible. I liked what you were saying about the endurance quality. That's really been a deep learning for me.

Linda: You know, it doesn't go on forever. Well, it sort of goes on forever but this stage doesn't go on forever. Just make sure you don't become – and it might be good that you are having a bit of a break for a while too – that you don't become, umm, I don't mean complacent, but ...

Question: Yes, I know what you mean. I felt it yesterday. I was just sitting, doing what I am so well adjusted to doing and there was just this bit of, like I was kind of riding it rather than having to show up in a way. It's not that I wasn't working. It's just that there's a certain easiness to it that was a little bit...

Linda: That's what I mean.

Question: Yes, I felt that.

Linda: Yes, be careful of that and when you're away – when you can – sit. Come to Barcelona if you can, if you're around.

Question: And the senses have been homogenizing in and out a it. It's not like a stable thing but it's like trying to take it all in and getting a bit tired.

Linda: Yes, so again when you're away – it's hard when you're travelling and it's not like you do it every day but – do it. Make sure you do do it. When you're at your parents' place you should be able to. Well maybe.

Question: Survival! 😊 (laughter)

Question: Early in the retreat you talked about having attachment to a teacher. My question is, can you become enlightened without being devoted to a teacher?

Linda: Umm, probably. It's not *easier* but it takes away some of the ... It sort of makes it easier if you do have a teacher because they take on a lot of your karma, in a way.

Being devoted to a teacher – it's not really the teacher personally, it's what they embody. And that's what you want, not them personally. You don't want to be like that teacher personally but they

embody what you want. If you can recognize that in someone – any teacher – and what they say resonates with you, it can really, really help. Because the mind is so strong and deep seated that it's very difficult to do it by yourself. You need that reassurance and you need that energetic input to really keep wearing the mind down. Just sitting in front of someone who is free from their mind, who is not controlled by their mind anymore, is really affecting what's left of someone else's mind. The mind will react in different ways but essentially it is wearing it down.

What I found, and I had a few teachers, when they were there it just made the whole thing so real and so possible. What your mind is saying is, "It's not possible for me. Maybe for someone else but not for me, it's not possible." However much you want it there is still that feeling, that belief, that it is not possible. So when you've got someone sitting in front of you who you trust is realised, it's confronting the mind again and again and again, just going, "Well, it is possible – look! I'm sitting in front of this person and I trust that they are realised. It is possible. And if it's possible for them, why not me?"

It is a bit harder when there are thousands and thousands of people and someone is sitting up on a stage, because that automatically creates a bit of a separation where you go, "They are special, they're up on a stage. It's not possible for me." So a situation like *this* can be – I'm not saying has to be – can be more beneficial. So it's not essential but it was for me. That's all I can say – it was for me. And I think for most people it is because otherwise it's too abstract and ethereal. What is enlightenment? But if you've got someone embodying that state it just makes it so much more tangible.

Question: Thank you. My experience so far is I have been studying and practicing a Tibetan Buddhism and just as I was about to take a vow with a teacher, he was accused of clergy misconduct. So now that's not really an option for me. And I feel quite thrown by that because I was just there. I'm going through a period of questioning whether that is really something that I even need, given that – how do I know if someone is really realised?

Linda: Yes, well it can put you off, that sort of thing, but a lot of people have been through it. It takes time to trust someone. And I can say to you, "Trust me in this," but don't trust me to cut your hair or something like that. 😊 (laughing) It's not that sort of trust, it's a deeper trust. It's a strange thing. And people put all this stuff on someone who says they are realised, like they should behave like this or that. But with this, you can trust me.

Question: That was something that I appreciate about the experience actually – I got to realise what exactly I was projecting on him, as well and how I was still looking for someone to save me.

Linda: Yes, and someone who's your idea of perfect, someone who's enlightened, who does this and that, and doesn't do this and doesn't do that. Whereas why, you know? And I used to do the same thing on my teachers – think that they should be always happy or something like that. It was just my projection. What did I know really about how it felt to be enlightened and how you behave? You really don't know. So, yes there is that.

The advantage I had was that a few of my teachers I could get really close to. There weren't thousands of people around so I did see them during the day, like living with them, seeing them, and they were just ordinary human beings. So there wasn't this great hoo-ha about them being perfect or God or anything. I could see that they had behaviours that some people might have felt weren't

really appropriate – not sexual behaviours – but just ordinary things like a bit of neurotic stuff. So you don't become this perfect human being.

Question: Thank you. I also wanted to say that I've really appreciated learning this practice that you do and I have noticed that it is very strengthening. I've noticed, and it's never happened to me in retreat before, I've been thinking about the same situation every single day, almost every single sit, and it's been really exhausting. But I think you said something early on about there being that opportunity then for that single-pointedness. And there's been such revulsion, like at one point I thought it's like eating too much chocolate cake. But it's been this opportunity to go, "Okay, it's up again, and what can I do? I'm going to go back to counting." I can really zone out and fantasize quite easily and this has given me an extra bit of discipline to come back, or strengthening faith maybe in my capacity to come back, come back, come back. So I've really appreciated it. A lot of my practices, when it gets too much, I connect with sensation, the world, nature. This is more internal. I look forward to practicing it a bit more.

Linda: Yes, you do become very, very strong.

Strangely enough, my attachment to my teachers led to this incredible strength eventually within me. I used that attachment to nurture that strength. It sounds like a paradox but that's what happened. So that attachment led to, eventually, the end of all my attachments, because this was a much more pure attachment. And it wasn't to them personally, it was to this, to what they represented. So, good, really good.